

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EURE-00 NSC-07 NSCE-00 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASH DC IMMEDIATE 402

SECDEF WASH DC IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 2039

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NATO, BE

SUBJECT: REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT FOR F-104

REF: (A) BRUSSELS 457; (B) BRUSSELS 1992; (C) STATE 66995

1. BELGIAN AIR STAFF REPRESENTATIVE HAS INFORMED MAAG OFFICER THAT BELGIAN GOVERNMENT IN A MEETING ON APRIL 3 INVOLVING DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS, FOREIGN MINISTER VAN ELSLANDE, AND ECONOMICS MINISTER CLAES AMONG OTHERS HAD DECIDED TO PURCHASE THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1 AS THE REPLACEMENT FOR THE F-104. ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING HAS BEEN SIGNED BETWEEN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AND DASSAULT TO THIS EFFECT. THE AGREEMENT IS CONTINGENT UPON A SECOND COUNTRY JOINING
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BELGIUM IN THE PURCHASE OF THE SUPER F-1 PRIOR TO 31

JULY. THE SECOND COUNTRY COULD BE FRANCE.

2. ARMED WITH THIS CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION, BUT WITHOUT REFERRING SPECIFICALLY TO IT, I SOUNDED OUT MINISTER CLAES LAST NIGHT ON THE RUMORS THAT A DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN. HE STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO FINAL DECISION ON A REPLACEMENT FOR THE F-104 AND THAT THIS DECISION WOULD BE DEFERRED TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT NOW BEING FORMED. CLAES STATED THAT THE ONLY DECISION MADE BY THE PRESENT CABINET WAS TO NARROW THE CHOICE TO THE MIRAGE SUPER F-1 OR THE NORTHROP COBRA.

3. COMMENT: MINISTER CLAES HAS BEEN A RELIABLE INFORMANT IN THE PAST AND I AM INCLINED TO ACCEPT WHAT HE TOLD ME LAST NIGHT, WHICH IS IN LINE WITH WHAT I WAS TOLD BY VANDEN BOEYNANTS EARLIER (SEE REF A). WE ARE PUZZLED BY THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION WITH THE INFORMATION FROM THE BELGIAN AIR STAFF. GIVEN THE CONDITIONAL NATURE OF THE REPORTED AGREEMENT REFERRED TO IN PARA 1 ABOVE, CLAES MAY NOT FEEL THAT IT CONSTITUTES A FINAL DECISION, OR THERE MAY BE MORE CONDITIONS ATTACHED THAN THE BELGIAN AIR STAFF IS AWARE OF. IT IS MY IMPRESSION, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS A FIERCE STRUGGLE GOING ON WITHIN THE GOB BUREAUCRACY ON THIS MATTER. I TOO SUSPECT THAT IN VIEW OF THE UNSETTLED POLITICAL SITUATION IN FRANCE, THE BELGIANS MAY POSSIBLY HOLD OFF ANY FINAL DECISION ON MIRAGE UNTIL THE SITUATION IN FRANCE IS CLARIFIED, DESPITE STRONG PRESSURES IN BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE CIRCLES IN FAVOR OF THE MIRAGE (REF C). UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT OUR BEST TACTIC WOULD BE TO TAKE THE MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS AT FACE VALUE. DRAWING ON VANDEN BOEYNANTS AND CLAES' STATEMENTS TO ME, I SUGGEST THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN CALL IN AMBASSADOR LORIDAN TO CONFIRM OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT NO DECISION HAS YET BEEN TAKEN ON THIS SUBJECT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. AND NATO AND TO REITERATE OUR TRUST THAT THIS DECISION WILL BE TAKEN PRIMARILY ON TECHNICAL-MILITARY AND ECONOMIC GROUNDS AND WILL ALSO BE CONSISTENT WITH LARGER POLITICAL INTERESTS OF THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. STRAUSSZ-HUPE
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